



Frequently Asked Questions: 2022 HOONAH BEACHES MONITORING PROGRAM

What is the BEACH program?

The Beaches Environmental Assessment and Coastal Health (BEACH) Act was passed by the U.S. Congress in 2002 in response to increased occurrences of water-borne illnesses. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) administers grant funds to states, tribes and territories under the Act to establish monitoring and public notification programs. In Alaska, the BEACH funds come through DEC and are typically administered as grants to local communities. The BEACH program has established national marine water quality monitoring and reporting standards for fecal waste contamination and notifies the public when levels exceed state standards.

Why monitor Hoonah beaches?

A monitoring program is being initiated for the community of Hoonah to evaluate potential health risks by fecal coliform and enterococci bacteria, and to notify the public when levels exceeded state recreation standards. Hoonah was included in the beach program based on the information provided by Hoonah Indian Association in the Alaska Beach Survey. The monitoring information can be used by local communities to help make informed decisions.

When and where does monitoring occur?

Monitoring will begin in June and continue to early September to provide the information over the entire recreation period. Weekly water samples are collected early in the week and sent to a lab for analysis. Results are posted to DEC's web page and on social media on Thursday or Friday that week.

Similar to 2021, water samples will be collected at two high-use, public recreational beaches where contact with water is most likely - Inner Point Sophia Beach and Gartina Harbor Way Beach.

What are potential sources of bacteria?

Potential sources of bacteria within these recreational beach areas include sewage treatment facility, landfill, stormwater drain outfalls, small boat harbor, commercial vessel dock, cruise ship, ferry, and barge passages, seafood processing plant, wildlife, and pet feces.

Is the water safe to swim or fish in?

When elevated fecal bacteria levels are present in the marine water, precautionary measures are advised. DEC recommends people avoid exposure, such as swimming in the water, and wash after contact with the marine water. Commonly documented health issues from swimming in bacteria contaminated recreational waters include gastrointestinal illness, respiratory illnesses, skin rashes, and ear, eye, and wound infections.

Is the fish safe to eat?

Yes, fish are safe to eat, however we recommend you rinse fish with clean water after they have been harvested from the area. Please follow safe food handling recommendations and cook seafood to a minimum internal temperature of 145 degrees Fahrenheit to destroy any bacteria. Note that freezing alone does not kill pathogens.

What happens if there are elevated results?

DEC will share monitoring results with the City of Hoonah, and other stakeholders. If the levels exceed state recreation standards, DEC will send a notification to stakeholders via the Alaska Beach Program Listserv, post on DEC social media accounts, and update the Alaska Beach Program website. The website has interactive maps showing advisories at specific beaches, monitoring reports, press releases, and other project resources. In addition, the beach landowner posts advisory signs at the affected beach.

Are you interested in receiving monitoring updates? You can sign up for the Beach Program Listserv by clicking the link at beaches.alaska.gov.

What can I do to help?

Beach users can pick up after their pets, stay healthy by washing your hands after contacting beach water, and before eating and drinking. And stay up to date on current water quality conditions by visiting the DEC Beach website.

For Additional Program Information

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